

United States Senate

October 7, 2014

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hagel,

Although the Department of Defense has yet to define the ongoing operations in Iraq and Syria that you recently described as still in their infancy, the Department is sending 500 soldiers from the "Big Red One," 1st Infantry Division from Fort Riley, Kansas, to establish a division headquarters in Iraq for the first time since the 2011 withdrawal of U.S. forces. I am deeply concerned about the Department's plan to ensure the safety and security of Big Red One soldiers and other U.S. military forces when the roles, missions and objectives of the United States in Iraq are still being determined. I am also troubled by the Department's mixed messages over the last several days with regard to clearly defining the campaign of operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria in order to dutifully recognize the service of participating U.S. military forces.

As you know, soldiers from the Big Red One will be the first among the U.S. military outside the scope of special operators currently serving in an advisory capacity to the Iraqi and Kurdish forces. Last week, my staff requested more information as to the roles, responsibilities and missions assigned to the Big Red One upon their deployment to Iraq and other areas in the Middle East. Of these 500 soldiers, I understand that approximately 200 will be based at U.S. Joint Operations Centers (JOCs) in Baghdad and the Kurdish capital of Irbil. However, media reports quote Pentagon press secretary, Rear Adm. John Kirby, stating that they will not "embed" or serve as advisors within the Iraqi and Kurdish headquarters. If Big Red One soldiers are not in advisory roles, then it would seem they are not a part of the 1,600 military personnel authorized by President Obama to serve as advisors to the Iraqi National Security forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga. This disparity in defining their role gives me great concern and merits a need for explanation:

- What missions are assigned to the 200 or more Big Red One soldiers in Baghdad and Irbil as part of the ongoing operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria?;
- Does the President have the authority to assign missions outside of advisory role?; and
- Please describe the missions of the Big Red One soldiers not based on the JOCs in Baghdad and Irbil.

Understanding the roles and missions for the Big Red One and other U.S. military forces deployed in the fight against ISIS is increasingly troublesome because of the back-and-forth messaging from the Department of Defense about this untitled and undefined campaign.

On Thursday, October 2, 2014, a Pentagon spokesman announced that U.S. forces would become eligible for honors and service medals by considering the missions in Iraq as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), which began thirteen years ago today, October 7, 2001, and continues to define our nation's war in Afghanistan. Yet, the Pentagon seemingly reversed this statement yesterday declaring that decisions had not yet been made to determine the recognition of those participating in this campaign. It seems the Administration and the Department of Defense are caught in a precarious situation that leads to a number of questions about the President's authority to continue the use of military force in a to-be-determined operation. If considered an extension of our current war in Afghanistan with OEF, then these operations are more than just a conflict as the President suggests. It is my belief that this campaign is an entirely new operation against a growing army of terrorists. The President must seek Congressional approval in defining these operations and the use of military force. The back-and-forth messaging clearly draws attention to the Administration's haphazard planning, which wrongs our U.S. forces who deserve proper credit and recognition when they readily serve our country.

When sending soldiers into harm's way, a clear path and plan should be defined for their service and sacrifice. Their desire to serve should be matched by the Administration's desire to define their roles and missions against a legal framework that authorizes their service in defense of our country. I request a response by October 21, 2014 that describes the roles and missions of the Big Red One as mentioned above and a specific explanation defining the campaign and authorization that describes the use of military force in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Sincerely,



Senator Jerry Moran